

# NOW THAT WE'VE MET, WHAT DO I SAY?

*General Guidelines for Communicating  
With Persons Who Have Disabilities*



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♦ SPECIAL GUIDE ♦

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## LANGUAGE GUIDE

OUTDATED OR OFFENSIVE	REASON	CURRENTLY ACCEPTED*
<i>The</i> anything: The handicapped. The disabled. The blind.	Views people in terms of their disability. Groups people into one undifferentiated category. Condescending.	People with disabilities. Deaf people. Blind people.
Deaf and dumb. Dumb. Deaf-mute.	Implies mental incapacitation.	Deaf. Hearing-Impaired.
Confined to a wheelchair. Wheelchair-bound.	Wheelchairs don't confine; they make people mobile.	Wheelchair-user. Uses a wheelchair.
Cripple. Crippled.  Handicapped.	From Old English: <i>to creep</i> . Also: <i>inferior</i> . Dehumanizing. Disabilities don't handicap; attitudes and architecture handicap.	Physical disability.  Physical disability.
Deformed. Freak. Vegetable.	Connotes repulsiveness, oddness. Dehumanizing.	Multiple disabilities. Severe disabilities.
Crazy. Insane. Psycho. Maniac.	Stigmatizing.	Behavior disorder. Emotional disability.
Retarded. Retardate. Slow. Simple. Moron. Idiot. Mongoloid(ism).	Stigmatizing.	People with mental retardation. Developmentally delayed.  Has Down syndrome.

\* Indicates suggested changes in terminology

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## COMMUNICATING WITH PERSONS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES

**1**

See the person who has a disability as a person, not as a disability.

**2**

Don't "talk down." Avoid responding to persons with disabilities out of "gratefulness" for not having a disability yourself.

**3**

Speak directly to the person who has a disability, not to a companion or an interpreter.

**4**

Treat adults as adults. Don't use first names unless that familiarity is extended to everyone present.

**5**

Be considerate. It might take extra time for the person with a disability to say or do things.

**6**

Relax. Don't worry about using common expressions like "See you later" or "I've got to be running along" when talking to persons with physical or visual disabilities.



# STATISTICS

Figures for disabilities in the U.S. vary widely, from 30 million to 50 million people.

The number of persons who fall into more than one category has been estimated at 35 million.

## **11.7 Million Physically Disabled People**

*This includes:*

Wheelchair users

People who use crutches, canes or walkers

Mobility-impaired older people, etc.

## **2.4 Million Deaf People**

## **11.0 Million Hearing Impaired People**

## **1.8 Million Blind People**

## **8.2 Million Visually Impaired People**

## **6.8 Million Mentally Disabled People**

## **1.7 Million Homebound People**

*This includes:*

People with chronic health disorders

People with wasting diseases like  
multiple sclerosis

## **2.1 Million Institutionalized People**

*This includes:*

People with mental disturbances

People with mental retardation

People with terminal illness

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## PERSONS WHO USE WHEELCHAIRS OR CRUTCHES

**1**

Don't lean or hang on a person's wheelchair. It is part of that person's body space.

**2**

Sit, squat or kneel if conversation continues for more than a few minutes.  
Don't be a "pain in the neck."

**3**

Ask a wheelchair occupant if he or she wants to be pushed *before* you do so.

**4**

Allow a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches to keep them within reach. Many wheelchair users can transfer to chairs, car seats, etc. Some wheelchair users can walk with crutches part of the time.

**5**

Consider distance, weather conditions and surfaces such as stairs, curbs or inclines when giving directions.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS, FILMS AND VIDEOS

The following materials are available  
through your local public library.

### **"Who Are The DeBolts?"**

*(16mm film)*

Academy Award-winning documentary about the DeBolt family and their nineteen children — all but five of whom have multiple disabilities.

### **Move Over, Wheelchairs Coming Through!**

by Ronald Roy

*(Nonfiction)*

Takes a brief look into the lives of seven young people who use wheelchairs. Includes photographs, index and bibliography of related reading. For ages 8-13.

### **A Good Man Is Hard To Find**

by Flannery O'Connor

*(Fiction)*

Short story collection. Of special interest is *Good Country People*, about a young woman whose prosthetic leg is stolen by a bible salesman.

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**PERSONS WHO HAVE SPEECH DIFFICULTIES****1**

Give your complete attention to the person who has difficulty speaking.

**2**

Be patient. Don't correct and don't speak for the person. Allow extra time. Give help when needed.

**3**

Keep your manner encouraging.

**4**

Ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head, when necessary.

**5**

If you have difficulty understanding, don't pretend. Repeat as much as you do understand. The person's reaction will clue you in.



## RECOMMENDED BOOKS, FILMS AND VIDEOS

The following materials are available  
through your local public library.

### **"My Left Foot"**

*(Videocassette)*

Autobiographical story about Christy Brown, Irish painter and writer, who was born with cerebral palsy. Brown emerges as a wholly realized person. Won Academy Awards in 1990 for Best Actor and Best Supporting Actress.

### **The Painted Bird**

by Jerzy Kosinski

*(Fiction)*

Confronted with extreme irrationality and brutality, a six-year-old boy in German-occupied Poland during World War II elects to become mute. His silence, loss of innocence and hatred become his means of survival.

### **The Night of the Bozos**

by Jan Slepian

*(Fiction)*

Story about a young man who stutters and his thirteen-year-old nephew who is reclusive. Together they leave their self-imposed isolation for the possibilities of relationships in the real world. For young adult readers.

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~~LSX~~PERSONS WHO HAVE MENTAL RETARDATION**1**

Speak slowly and distinctly.  
*Show* might be more effective  
than *tell*.

**2**

Tell the person what to do,  
*not* what not to do.

**3**

Help the person feel comfortable.  
Maintain nonthreatening voice and  
facial expressions.

**4**

Treat the adult person who has  
mental retardation as an adult.

**5**

Base exceptions to rules on reason,  
not pity.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS, FILMS AND VIDEOS

The following materials are available  
through your local public library.

### **"Clockworks"**

*(16mm film)*

Short story about a boy with Down's syndrome. All the actors are amateurs; the boy who plays the lead actually has Down's syndrome.

### **The Alfred Summer**

by Jan Slepian

*(Fiction)*

The setting is Brooklyn in the 1930s. The major characters, who have various physical and emotional disabilities, learn and grow but are not portrayed as superhuman. For young adult readers.

### **The Sound and the Fury**

by William Faulkner

*(Fiction)*

The reader enters the thoughts of three members of a genteel southern family, one of whom is a person with mental retardation, in this chronicle of decay and continuum.

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## PERSONS WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS

### 1

Get the person's attention.  
Wave your hand, tap the person's shoulder or bang on the table, if necessary.

### 2

Speak clearly and slowly.  
Don't shout or exaggerate lip movements. Keep sentences short.

### 3

Be flexible in your language.  
If the person has difficulty understanding you, rephrase your statement using simpler words.  
Don't keep repeating.  
If difficulty persists, write it down.

### 4

Provide a clear view of your face and keep the light source on it.  
Keep hands, food, etc. away from your mouth when talking.

### 5

Be a lively speaker. Use facial expressions that match your tone of voice, and use gestures and body movements to aid communication.



## RECOMMENDED BOOKS, FILMS AND VIDEOS

The following materials are available  
through your local public library.

### **“Across the Silence Barrier”**

*(16mm film)*

Explores the world of deaf people. Part of the NOVA series.

### **Deaf Like Me**

by Thomas Spradley and James Spradley

*(Nonfiction)*

True story about a family's struggle to raise their deaf daughter.

### **The Hunchback of Notre Dame**

by Victor Hugo

*(Fiction)*

Classic story of a man whose multiple disabilities, not the least of which is his deafness, make him a target for inhumane treatment.

### **A Button In Her Ear**

by Ada Litchfield

*(Fiction)*

Illustrated, unsentimental story about a girl who needs a hearing aid. For ages 6-8.

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PERSONS WHO HAVE VISION LOSS**1**

Introduce yourself and any others who may be with you. Use a normal tone of voice.

**2**

Use the person's name when starting conversation so he or she knows you are speaking to them. Let the person know when you are ending a conversation or moving away.

**3**

Ask the person if he or she wants help. When giving assistance, allow the person to take your arm, which helps you to guide.

Warn the person of any steps or changes in level.

Use specifics such as *left* and *right*.

**4**

Offer seating by placing the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.

**5**

Don't pet a guide dog. Remember to walk on the side of the person away from the dog.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS, FILMS AND VIDEOS

The following materials are available  
through your local public library.

### **"Finding My Way"**

*(Videocassette)*

Produced for WGBH-TV, Boston. Focuses on a boy who is blind but learning to become independent in his neighborhood and school. For juvenile and young adult viewers.

### **The Miracle Worker**

by William Gibson

*(Play)*

A play in three acts based on the life of the young Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan.

### **Annerton Pit**

by Peter Dickinson

*(Fiction)*

The author has created a ghost story and psychological thriller through the senses of Jake, a boy who is blind. For young adult readers.

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